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ABSTRACT

Based on a study which monitored over 150 episodes of television programs on a random basis, this report addresses the following questions: (1) How visible are Black, Hispanic, Asian, and Native American characters on entertainment television? On what types of shows do they appear? (2) What is the state of race relations on television? Do characters encounter bias or is there racial harmony? When problems do occur, are they individual in nature or are they institutional? (3) What types of jobs do women and men of color hold on television? How do their employment patterns compare to those in the real world? (4) Are minority characters on television drawn with distinct identities? Or are they, appearance aside, indistinguishable from White characters? (5) Are Black, Hispanic, Asian, and Native American characters on television faring equally well? Or are there differences in portrayals? and (6) What is the relationship of employment behind the scenes to image? Do programs featuring people of color employ minority producers and writers? Highlights of the study include: (1) almost all minority characters on television are Black; (2) 9 out of 10 minority characters on television are middle class or wealthy; (3) television's world is one of racial harmony; (4) most programs reduce injustice to individual conflict; (5) minority female characters are segregated in sitcoms, the only place where they have leading roles; and (6) minority producers constitute only 7% of all producers working on shows with minority characters, while minority female producers constitute only 2% of the total. (GL)

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Unequal Picture

Black, Hispanic, Asian and Native American Characters on Television

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National Commission on Working Women

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Wider Opportunities for Women (WOW) is a national women's employment organization which works to achieve economic independence and equal opportunity for women in the workplace. The National Commission on Working Women, which merged with WOW in January, 1987, advocates on behalf of women in non-professional occupations. These women represent 39 million workers and 75% of the female labor force.

Unequal Picture is funded by a grant from the Ford Foundation as part of WOW's project on Women, Work and the Future.

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ABOUT THE COMMISSION:

The National Commission on Working Women of Wider Opportunities for Women works to improve the economic status of working women across the United States.

Today, the Commission is led by a multi-sector advisory group composed of corporate and labor union leaders, congressional officials, educators, media representatives, women's advocacy leaders and working women themselves. These sectors bring diverse experiences and various points of view to Commission deliberations, resulting in broad-based, effective strategies to improve the lives of working women.

Early in its history, the Commission selected the media as an area of broad concern. Research has documented the importance of television in society. It is a powerful shaper of our attitudes, behavior and knowledge of the world. Research has also documented the treatment of women on television: Their portrayal tends to be stereotyped, narrow and unrepresentative of the rich diversity of real women's lives. Because of the power of these accumulated images of women, the Commission has developed projects that increase the visibility and eradicate the stereotypes of women on television.

Beginning in 1979, Commission media projects have included the following activities:

* Sponsorship of the annual Women at Work Broadcast Awards competition which honors the nation's best television and radio programs about working women;

* Publication of annual critiques of the fall TV season analyzing the image of female characters on the new shows;

* Publication of reports analyzing adolescent girls, families and older women on prime time television;

* Creation of a national symposium for TV and radio producers, directors and advocacy groups to discuss the status of women in the broadcasting industry;

* Sponsorship of a 10-day museum exhibit of award-winning TV programs about working women and a concurrent seminar series;

* Publication of a "viewer scorecard" to increase audience awareness of television's portrayal of women;

* Creation of media watch training workshops focusing on the portrayal of older women in the media and the image of adolescent girls; and

* Publication of an employment report analyzing the status of women producers, writers and directors on prime time TV.

Unequal Picture is the most recent project in the Commission's 11-year history of media work. The report will be distributed to women's organizations, civil rights groups, churches, educational institutions and other groups as part of a public education campaign encouraging viewer awareness and response. The report will also be sent to the television networks and production studios and its findings discussed as part of an ongoing dialogue on women and television between the Commission and the television industry.

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INTRODUCTION

For many Americans, television is a window on the world. It exposes viewers to people they've never seen and places they've never been. Television communicates with such seeming authenticity that its portrayals of groups and coverage of issues often overshadow reality.

Since television's beginnings, minority groups have expressed concern over their image on the screen. Blacks, Hispanics, Asians, and Native Americans have complained about invisibility and stereotyped treatments. They have known that television is a major source of information about minorities, and that much of the information viewers receive, especially from entertainment programs, is distorted.

Research has documented both television's ability to influence and its lack of authentic minority portrayals. In the late 1960s, the Kerner Report, which was issued after Martin Luther King's assassination, faulted television for its stereotyped portrayals. It concluded that TV was "almost totally white in appearance and attitude." Ten years later, the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights found little improvement.

In the real world, much has changed since the Kerner Report was issued. Some political and social barriers have fallen. Significant gains have been made in certain fields. And the

growing numbers of Black, Hispanic and Asian people in some areas of the United States have made them the majority population.

Despite these changes, achievements and gains, the economic and social status of too many Americans of color remains precarious. Poverty rates for Black families are nearly double those of whites. Hispanic women are the lowest wage earners in our country. Racism troubles college campuses and major cities. And minority unemployment and infant mortality statistics indicate millions of people at risk. In the real world, American society is far from its goal of racial equality.

On television, the picture is not as clear. About one-third of all prime time programs contain minority characters, many in leading roles. On other shows, people of color occasionally appear, often in roles of prestige. The number of minority characters on TV has certainly grown since the 1960s, and their roles have become somewhat more diverse.

However, it has not been clear, aside from increased numbers and less blatant stereotyping, whether other gains have been made. Are portrayals biased? Do Hispanics, Asians, and Native Americans have greater visibility? How do women of color fare compared to men? And what about the employment of minority writers and producers behind the camera?

This report examines both the image of minority characters on prime time TV programs and the employment status of minority

producers and writers behind the camera. The report answers the following questions:

1. How visible are Black, Hispanic, Asian and Native American characters on entertainment television? In what types of shows do they appear?
2. What is the state of race relations on TV? Do characters encounter bias or is there harmony? When problems do occur, are they individual in nature or institutional?
3. What types of jobs do women and men of color hold on TV? How do their employment patterns compare to those in the real world?
4. Are minority characters on TV drawn with distinct identities? Or are they, appearance aside, indistinguishable from white characters?
5. Are Black, Hispanic, Asian, and Native American characters on TV faring equally well? Or are there differences in portrayals?
6. And finally, what is the relationship of employment behind the scenes to image? Do programs featuring people of color employ minority producers and writers?

As America progresses into the twenty-first century, diverse groups of people are increasingly working side by side. Research shows that the majority of new entrants into the future work

force will be minorities, women and immigrants, a significant change from the past. Within each ethnic and racial group is wide-ranging diversity.

Television has a role to play as we prepare for this future. Its daily portrayals of Black, Hispanic, Asian and Native American people can either perpetuate stereotypes or broaden narrow horizons and increase understanding.

The Commission's report, Unequal Picture, is one step toward documenting TV's portrayals of minorities so that viewers, as well as broadcasters, can effectively work toward the creation of characters and programs which truly reflect the diversity and complexity of people living in America today.

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

Unequal Picture, the Commission's twelfth report examining women and the media, analyzes the images of Black, Hispanic, Asian and Native American characters on prime time entertainment television. The report also examines the treatment of issues of race on TV. In addition, it measures the employment of people of color working behind the camera. Over 150 episodes of programs containing recurring minority characters were monitored for this report.

Listed below are report highlights:

* On TV, almost all minority characters are Black. Of the 78 Black, Hispanic, Asian and Native American characters on prime time TV, 65 (83%) are Black, nine (12%) are Hispanic, and three (4%) are Asian. Only one (1%) is Native American.

* On TV, nine out of ten minority characters are middle class or wealthy. About 20% are upper middle class or rich, while over two-thirds are solidly middle class. Less than 10% are working class and none are poor. In reality, more than 40% of minority men and more than 60% of minority women have incomes below $10,000 a year. Fewer than 3% of minority men and 1% of minority women have annual incomes above $50,000.

* TV's world is one of racial harmony. The workplace is an egalitarian one with no hint of bias even though whites are almost always in charge. People of color appear to feel comfortable in this world, where they are willing helpers and form close friendships with their white peers and bosses.

* Most programs reduce injustice to individual conflict, denying the reality of oppressive social structures, except for a very few shows which present a multi-cultural world.

* Minority female characters are segregated in sitcoms, the only place where they have leading roles. Almost three-quarters of all minority females on TV are featured in comedies.

* Minority producers constitute only 7% of all producers working on shows with minority characters. Minority female producers comprise only 2% of the total. Of 162 producers working on 30 shows containing minority characters, only 12 are people of color, while 150 (93%) are white. Of the twelve minority producers, eight are male and four are female.

PROFILE OF MINORITY CHARACTERS ON TELEVISION

In the spring of 1989, 30 network entertainment programs featuring minority characters aired during prime time. A total of 78 minority characters appeared regularly in those shows, 38 women and 40 men.

Thirteen of the 30 shows were sitcoms, seven were dramas, another seven were cop/detective shows and three were action/adventure. NBC aired the most programs containing minority characters with 14 shows; ABC aired ten shows, CBS aired five, and the Fox Network aired one.

Of the 30 programs, eleven (37%) contained no minority female characters.

Almost All Minority Characters on TV are Black: Of the 78 minority characters on TV, 65 (83%) are Black. Of the Black characters, 33 are women and 32 are men. Nine are Hispanic (five women, four men), three are Asian (all men), and one is a Native American male.

Segregated on Sitcoms: 71% of all minority female characters appear in sitcoms. Out of 38 women, 27 are featured in comedies. In fact, almost half (47%) appear in only four programs ("The Cosby Show," "A Different World," "227" and "Amen"). Minority males fare the same. Forty-seven percent are featured in

sitcoms, while the rest are spread out over the prime time programming schedule.

Women are Younger than Men: Almost one-third (31%) of all women of color on TV are under 20 years old, while only 13% of male characters are that age. Because of this age discrepancy, TV viewers see over twice as many minority female students as males.

On TV 81% of all minority female characters and 76% of all minority males are under age 40. Only 3% of females are over age 60, while 8% of males are that age.

On TV People of Color Work as Cops and Detectives: Thirty-one percent of all minority men on TV work as cops, detectives or spies. Twenty-two percent have professional occupations, while 9% do factory work. The remainder work as technicians, messengers, butlers or are retired. Eleven percent are in the army.

In reality, only 4% of employed men of color are in protective service jobs. Roughly 13% of Black and Hispanic men hold professional or managerial jobs, while 30% work in factories or as laborers. Five percent are in the military.

In contrast to the real world where a small percentage (14%) of women of color work in professional careers, on TV about one out of three do (30%). Twenty-six percent have clerical jobs on

TV, while thirteen percent are cops and detectives. Another thirteen percent are homemakers, while others work as bailiffs, dorm mothers, are retired or in the army. One female character (Maria on "One of the Boys") wears a hardhat and works in construction.

In reality, about 40% of minority women are in clerical, technical and sales occupations. Only 1% are police officers or detectives. Fewer than 2% work in construction trades.

Poverty is Invisible: On TV, nine out of ten minority characters are middle-class or wealthy. About 20% are upper-middle class or affluent, while two-thirds are solidly middle class. Less than 10% are working class, and no one lives in poverty. There is no economic discrepancy between males and females.

In reality, more than one-quarter of minority households have incomes under $10,000 a year. Another quarter have annual incomes between $10,000 and $20,000. For individuals, the contrast is even more startling. More than 40% of minority men and over 60% of minority women have incomes below $10,000 a year. Fewer than 3% of minority men and 1% of minority women have annual incomes above $50,000.

Most are Single: Almost two-thirds of all minority men and women on TV are single. An additional 10% are divorced or widowed. Thirty percent of females are married, while 17% of males are.

In reality, less than 40% of minority men and women are single.

A WORLD OF RACIAL HARMONY

Most television shows containing Black, Hispanic, Asian and Native American characters have integrated casts. The majority of these programs feature one or two minority characters, while the rest of the characters are white.

In TV's integrated world, racial harmony rules. The TV workplace is an egalitarian one, with little hint of racism or bias despite the fact that whites are almost always in charge. Minority characters appear to feel comfortable in this world where they form close friendships with their white peers and bosses, showing no preference for colleagues who share their racial heritage. For the most part, TV's world, especially in its workplace, is one of white bosses and willing-helper minorities who are treated well.

For example, on "Night Court", the Black bailiffs Max and Roz get along splendidly with the white judge and lawyers, eating lunch together, socializing as a group and giving each other personal advice. Despite their similar jobs, Max and Roz have no special interest in each other, nor any exclusive relationship. Instead, they interact with whites whose workplace status is far above theirs. From every angle, the interaction is easy and natural. Professional rank poses no barrier, racism offers no

threat -- "Night Court" presents a harmonious group of people whose differences are minimal.

On "Designing Women," Anthony, an ex-con, is a witty Black messenger for an interior design business in Atlanta owned and operated by four white women. Functioning as their helper, confidante, advisor and friend, Anthony's job ranges from driving the van to house-sitting to giving personal advice. He is often a fly-on-the-wall as the women discuss their social lives, an unthreatening male in a female harem. The women's affection for Anthony is strong, as is his for them. Despite their differences in professional status, Anthony is "one of the family," and, in fact, he seems to have few other friends or interests outside of his life with his four female bosses.

On "Matlock," Tyler is an effective, energetic detective for his lawyer boss; on "Mission: Impossible," Grant is a brilliant computer scientist who is a key member of a high-risk spy team; on "Perfect Strangers," Harriet is a friendly elevator operator; and on "Hooperman," Felton is a cop who is Hooperman's sidekick. Cory on "Heartbeat" is a doctor who is good friends with the hospital's professional staff, while Sally on "Have Faith" is an indispensable secretary in a Catholic church run by priests.

All of these characters are the only Blacks in a world of whites. In some cases, they play subordinate roles to white leads; in other cases, they are equal members of a larger team.

However, none of them appears to face any special barriers or challenges because they are Black.

In an episode of "Have Faith," Sally disagrees with her boss, a priest who wants to close down bingo nights at the church. He thinks gambling is wrong, while she believes bingo represents an opportunity for neighbors to socialize. Even though the priest is not persuaded by her arguments, Sally secretly puts out neighborhood flyers announcing that bingo will continue anyway. When the priest sees his parishioners having such a good time, he realizes the error of his ways. He discovers that Sally was responsible for the unauthorized flyers, but instead of firing her, he congratulates her on her good sense and gives her a raise.

A striking example of racial harmony occurs on "The Robert Guillaume Show," which portrays an interracial romance between Edward, a Black marriage counselor and Ann, his white secretary. Ann is immediately welcomed into Edward's family by his widowed father and two teenage children, while Edward is warmly accepted by Ann's daughter. In fact, the two daughters quickly become best friends.

A moment of tension does occur in one episode when Ann and Edward are having an argument and she calls him "uppity." Ann is surprised when Robert becomes very angry, although the next day she apologizes by saying, "I talked to some of my friends last night and, believe me, when I said 'uppity' I had no idea what it

meant." Edward responds, "I know you didn't mean anything. It's just one of those terrible buzzwords that trigger a lot of bad feeling." Edward goes on to say that every relationship has problems and that there are things he could call Ann that would probably "drive her nuts." Ann agrees, saying that she was called "skinny arms" when she was a child, and it hurt her feelings. Edward nods in sympathy.

In this encounter, a racial epithet is equated with an innocent childhood taunt. Both are seen merely as upsetting buzzwords with no great significance or lasting ramifications.

The overall impression the viewer receives from most of these minority characters who mix so easily with their white colleagues is that they might as well be white themselves. Almost nowhere can the viewer detect any distinct racial identity. In fact, it sometimes seems as if the characters are actually white and are merely unconventionally cast with minority actors playing the parts.

However, some programs reveal a more complex inter-racial world, even though their overall tone may be one of harmony. On programs like "LA Law," "Miami Vice," "21 Jump Street," "Tour of Duty," and "China Beach," racial differences are acknowledged and greater ethnic diversity does appear.

"Miami Vice" is the only program with an integrated cast where Blacks and Hispanics outnumber whites. More unusual still is the fact that Lt. Castillo is the boss, rather than the

Hispanic sidekick. Despite these achievements, "Miami Vice" too often focuses its attention on Sonny Crockett, the white lead, to the exclusion of Tubbs, his Black partner; Castillo, his Hispanic boss; and Trudy and Gina, his Black and Hispanic colleagues. Their lives are greatly overshadowed by his and much less explored.

"21 Jump Street" is another example of a program with a more racially balanced cast. Captain Fuller is the Black police officer who is the leader of a group of young undercover cops, including Judy, a young Black woman and Ioki, a young Asian man. Although the world of "21 Jump Street" is tightly-knit, it is not artificially harmonious and the program does portray a multi-cultural world.

Likewise, "Tour of Duty" and "China Beach," two Vietnam war dramas, convey the tensions arising from American soldiers--white, Black and Hispanic -- fighting a war against Asians. Although greatly sanitized from actual occurrences, episodes from the shows do convey a sense of racism and intolerance among the soldiers themselves and their ignorance concerning Asian people.

The continuing message of both dramas is that, despite differing backgrounds and areas of conflict, women and men in the army are basically a family. Eruptions do occur, but the unit is strong enough to hold them. On one episode of "Tour of Duty," a Black soldier says to a white southerner, "My grandmother worked when I was growing up so I took care of myself. Growing up I

didn't have a family, but now that I'm over here, it's like you're my family."

What viewers glean from all of these programs -- comedies and dramas alike -- is a world with little or no racial friction. On most programs racial antagonism simply does not exist. Where it does exist, racism is attributable to individuals who are wrong-headed or malicious. Most importantly, racism is rarely called by its name, but rather is reduced to a personal quirk that needs correction.

As a result, TV's world of harmony does not present viewers with a picture of an ideal society where racism has been fought and overcome. Instead, it portrays an artificial universe where racial difficulties and realities are denied.

By consistently sweeping such major societal problems under the rug, television to a certain extent denies the actuality of racism in America. Real world racism, which is pervasive, subtle and blatant, is commonplace in America but virtually invisible on entertainment television.

UNDERCURRENTS OF TROUBLE

Although the dominant message of television programs is one of racial harmony, a handful of shows do convey a different tone. Two programs in particular, "A Man Called Hawk" and "In the Heat of the Night," explore racial issues in some depth, touching on Black history and identity, institutional racism and intra-racial relationships.

For example, an episode of "A Man Called Hawk" finds Hawk, a Black detective, hired by white Americans who have adopted a young Central American boy. They ask Hawk to protect them from unknown assailants. However, Hawk shifts his allegiance when he learns the assailants are the boy's real family and have been pursuing him since he was abducted and sold to Americans. When the American mother who hired Hawk asks him why it makes any difference who the boy's family is, Hawk becomes angry and responds, "What difference? Only 300 or 400 years ago when people my color were slaughtered and their babies were sold, just like those colonels sold Jonathan to you."

In almost every episode of "A Man Called Hawk," issues of race are explored. On one program, Hawk encourages his cousin, tempted by street life, to continue his training as a jazz musician, telling him, "Your heritage says you're a rich man; continue the tradition." On another program Hawk reminds a minister, overwhelmed by neighborhood killings, of the strength

of the Black church. Familiar with life in the street, Hawk confronts drug dealers both Black and white, telling them, "Brown people have enough adversity in their life without you."

A solitary figure, mysterious and larger than life, Hawk is a fierce protector of his people. He was once a high-ranking government spy, but now he works on his own, where he avenges wrong and is held in awe by both Blacks and whites.

"In the Heat of the Night" features Virgil Tibbs, a Black police officer, and his wife Althea, who teaches school. The show is set in Sparta, Mississippi, a small town where racism festers.

In one episode, Althea leads an effort to integrate an all-white church in Sparta. She meets with opposition from some church members who are opposed to integration, saying that their church is painted white and they wish to keep it that way. However, Althea discovers that, although there is resistance to integrating the church, racism has been a subterfuge for most of the violence, including the minister's murder. It turns out that a love triangle was really responsible for his death. Despite this softening of the plot, an authentic drama of sorts does get played out.

In another episode, Virgil goes into an all-white bar to interview a suspect, when he is purposely tripped and told by the bar owner, "I don't care if you are a cop, I don't want to see you in here again." It is clear that Sparta is still a

segregated town and that Virgil, for all his rank as a police officer, faces continual racism because he is Black.

One program shows the conflict Virgil faces when a Black woman in town is allegedly raped by a white man. Virgil's white colleagues accuse him of over-zealousness, claiming, "You'll do anything to prove your case because the victim was Black." Blacks, however, accuse him of covering up the truth. Virgil complains to his boss, "I'm getting it from both sides. In the Black community I'm too white, and in the white community I'm too Black."

On these two programs especially, and on several others to a lesser degree, stories do explore unjust social structures and portray cultural difference and racial plurality. Realities of Black life can be glimpsed as the white world acknowledges an existence outside itself.

BLACK SITCOMS

Among the most popular of all television programs are four situation comedies featuring all-Black casts. Operating in a world without white people, these shows range from slapstick to comedies with positive social messages. They are populated more by women than men and are characterized by warm interactions and close ties. Characters live successful lives, achieve their full potential and are positive role models.

"The Cosby Show," "A Different World," "227," and "Amen" have been on the air for many seasons and still draw huge audiences. Broadcasters claim that the enormous success and appeal of all four programs lies in the universality of their characters. They say "The Cosby Show" is not about a Black family, but about a family that happens to be Black. Similarly, "227" is seen by many as a newer version of Lucy and Ethel's antics in "I Love Lucy."

Characters in all of these programs live varying degrees of successful, affluent lives. The Cosby family is the wealthiest, with a physician father and a lawyer mother. The families on "227" and "Amen" are more solidly middle class, holding jobs that range from construction foreman to receptionist to homemaker. On "A Different World," economic classes intermingle with Whitley, the daughter of a wealthy judge, sharing a dorm room with Kim,

the first in her family to attend college where she is studying to become a doctor.

Program plots tackle issues of family conflict or growing up. For example, recent plots on "The Cosby Show" and "A Different World" have centered on Theo's having a wild party while his parents are out of town, Vanessa and Rudy's incessant squabbling, Sondra's exhaustion from her new babies, the appeal of fraternity fun versus the necessity of studying, the hazards of keeping stolen property and the importance of voting.

Often, the plots on these two programs convey themes with pro-social values. On "A Different World," Jesse Jackson emphasizes the importance of participating in the democratic process; Freddie is molested by her date on a show that explores date rape and sexual attitudes; and Dwayne runs for student office on a platform he believes in even though it's not popular with his classmates. On "The Cosby Show," Sammy Davis Jr. plays an illiterate grandfather who wants to learn how to read after his grandchild is born.

Far less explicitly pro-social are the weekly plots of "Amen" and "227." Although these programs frequently contain truisms such as the importance of studying or telling the truth, their appeal lies in zany action. Get-rich-quick schemes, landing a husband, being locked in a basement, hiding someone in the shower: silliness and slapstick typify these two shows.

Black sitcoms have been praised for their positive portrayal of Black family life, their focus on education and their emphasis on Black culture and identity. Black music and art especially, have been carefully threaded through these shows in a consistent manner. However, these programs have also been criticized for their failure to tackle issues of racial tension.

It is true that the appeal of all four programs lies in their humor and essential light-heartedness. They are cheery shows. Because they are sitcoms, their characters inhabit a friendly world where problems are manageable and negativity can be turned around. Real evil never intrudes. Thus, Clair makes partner in a Wall Street law firm with no trouble; none of the youngsters experience racial slurs at school or on the playground; and Cliff has equal numbers of Black and white patients. In short, race discrimination at work and school does not exist.

Many viewers, as well as social experts, would argue that such a harmonious picture of Black life is important, that seeing people strive and succeed unhampered by racial barriers paints the world the way it should be. At the very least, it offers relief from the way the world really is.

MINORITY FEMALE LEADING CHARACTERS

Although there are almost equal numbers of male and female minority characters on television, they are clustered differently on programs. Males are more likely to have leads in dramas, especially action/adventure shows, while females are more likely to star on sitcoms. In fact, the only shows in which women of color have leading roles are comedies.

The four comedies in which minority females have major roles are "The Cosby Show," "A Different World," "227," and "One of the Boys." An additional sitcom, "Jackee," which aired only once, contained a Black female lead.

Set in the home and the college dorm, these shows examine the ups and downs of family life and friendship. "The Cosby Show" and "227" rarely focus on the world of work; the kitchen, living room and front stoop are their places of action. "A Different World" has broader horizons, since its students are planning majors, selecting summer jobs and making decisions about their future. This past season, Whitley decided on an art history major, Kim was premed and Dwayne majored in math. The other students are still undecided.

"One of the Boys" is also a home-based comedy although its location sometimes switches to a construction office where Maria works for her husband Mike. Hired as a bookkeeper, she wants to be a hardhat construction worker. She's had previous experience

building houses in Venezuela and likes working with her hands. However, the guys on the crew are unhappy about her joining them, claiming, "Maria's going to come on the worksite and watch every little thing we do. We'll no longer be men." Mike is skeptical as well. He says to Maria, "You'll have to get up at four in the morning. It's hard work. Every time you bend down to pick up a hammer, the guys will be staring at you." But Maria is adamant, refusing to marry Mike unless he lets her do the work she loves, and at last she gets her hardhat and joins the crew.

Although minority female characters are over-represented in the sitcom world, they are harder to find in the world of drama. Women of color appear in supporting roles in "China Beach," "Miami Vice," "Heartbeat," "In the Heat of the Night" and "Knots Landing." They also appear in "21 Jump Street," "Falcon Crest," and "Nightingales." On these shows, they appear as detectives, army privates, bankers, nurses, doctors and teachers.

Despite their minor roles, several of the characters are quite distinctive. Ricki, a private on "China Beach," is competent, brave and funny. She learns to fly a helicopter on her own initiative and acts heroically during a crisis. Likewise, Judy, an undercover cop on "21 Jump Street," performs her job under enormous pressure. She is compassionate and tough at the same time.

These minority female characters are relatively recent additions to entertainment television. However, they still

appear in support roles rather than leading ones. The next step is for women of color to star in dramatic programs instead of only sitcoms.

ASIAN, HISPANIC AND NATIVE AMERICAN CHARACTERS ON TELEVISION

Of the Black, Hispanic, Asian and Native American groups studied for this report, Black characters are the most prevalent on TV, followed by Hispanics, Asians, and finally Native Americans.

Native American Characters

There is only one Native American character who regularly appears on prime time television this season. Featured on "Paradise," a western drama, the character is John Taylor. He's a medicine man who's educated, helpful and wise. He has long white hair and special intuitive powers which keep him in close touch with nature and children.

His character is a relatively minor one, however; he is the only regularly featured Native American on the show. The rest of the characters are white settlers who live in or near town.

"Paradise" is one of a very few "period" shows on TV. No Native American characters appear regularly on programs set in current times.

Asian Characters

Asian characters on TV are scarce. Only three appear regularly on prime time television: Chao-Li, a butler on "Falcon

Crest;" Billy, a radio producer on "Midnight Caller;" and Ioki, an undercover cop on "21 Jump Street." All of these characters are male, and all play supporting roles. In fact, the producer on "Midnight Caller" and the butler on "Falcon Crest" are such minor characters that plots never revolve around them; they are always in the background.

Two current shows about the Vietnam war, "Tour of Duty" and "China Beach," do feature Vietnamese actors week after week. Most often they play either Viet Cong fighters or South Vietnamese soldiers. Females play mostly waitresses and prostitutes. But none of these characters have regular roles on the show; instead, they appear in specific episodes and then are replaced by other characters in subsequent programs.

"China Beach" does contain a Vietnamese female character, Mai, who is the girlfriend of a Black American soldier, Sam Beckett. Although she appears infrequently, plots have explored Beckett's learning about her culture, her divided loyalties toward her country, her anger at the war and their love for each other. In one plot, Beckett signs up for another tour rather than leave Mai.

"Murphy's Law," which was cancelled in the spring of 1989, was the only prime time show featuring an Asian woman. It starred Kim, a young model, who shared an apartment and was in love with Murphy, an Irish insurance investigator. Unfortunately, the character of Kim, supposed to be Japanese-

Italian, was too often based on ethnic stereotyping. For example, in one episode when Kim thinks Murphy is with another woman and becomes jealous, she says, "The Japanese part of me says, 'Save face,' but the Italian part of me says, 'Fight for your man'!"

Hispanic Characters

Nine Hispanic characters appear regularly on prime time television programs. Four are men: Victor on "LA Law," Lt. Castillo on "Miami Vice," Alberto on "Tour of Duty," and Reuben on "Dream Street." Victor is a corporate attorney, Lt. Castillo is a police officer, Alberto is in the army and Reuben is a factory worker.

The five women are Maria, a construction worker on "One of the Boys;" Gina, a detective on "Miami Vice;" Maria, a gifted student on "Head of the Class;" Yola, a nurse on "Nightingales;" and Pilar, a bank executive on "Falcon Crest."

As is true with other minority characters, most Hispanics on television play supporting roles to white leads. For example, Gina (along with her Black partner Trudy) has for years been on the sidelines of the action in "Miami Vice." When Gina and Trudy do appear in an episode, they are usually filing, taking phone messages or else posing as skimpily-clad undercover cops. In five years of weekly programs, their characters have never been fully explored.

Maria, a Hispanic bookkeeper (turned construction worker), stars in "One of the Boys," and is at the center of the show's action. In a set-up similar to "Murphy's Law," Maria falls in love with her boss Mike, a widower with three teenage sons. Maria and Mike decide to marry after seven dates. Any possible hurdles arising from their different ethnic and cultural backgrounds are squashed by Mike's reassurance, "We're in the same place now."

Maria's ethnicity is a source of the show's humor. When she gets upset, she lapses into rapid Spanish which is unintelligible to those around her, and when speaking English, she occasionally stumbles over pronunciation. Maria is one of very few Hispanic females on TV; she is the only minority female in a nontraditional job. As such, her character has great potential. However, that potential has yet to be realized on this show which relies on her ethnicity only for humor.

Maria's character is not unlike that of Dora, a Hispanic housekeeper who starred in "I Married Dora" a few seasons ago. On that program, Dora, spunky and fun-loving like Maria, also married her boss, a widower with two children, to avoid being deported to Central America.

On occasion, television does explore ethnicity in a nongratuitous manner. Pilar on "Falcon Crest" is an ambitious Hispanic woman who has not forgotten her origins. She is a strong advocate for Hispanic concerns and has tried to build a

consortium of Hispanic businesses to increase their economic base in the community. Pilar's family, the Ortegas, have been featured this past season on "Falcon Crest" as well.

A recent episode of "LA Law" focused on prejudice and discrimination against Hispanics. Victor Sifuentes, a lawyer for a white firm, departed from his usual practice of corporate litigation to prosecute a liquor company that tried to shut down a Mexican competitor by spreading rumors that Mexican workers on the assembly line were urinating in the beer.

When colleagues at a staff meeting dismiss the seriousness of the rumor, Victor responds that if the brewery is forced to shut down, "over 1,200 people would be put out of work, almost everyone of them Mexican or Hispanic. This has to do with race. No one would believe a rumor like this about English or German beer, but with Hispanics, they figure it will play."

During the trial, Victor is pitted against a former buddy, also Hispanic, who was recruited as legal counsel by the Anglo liquor company for appearance sake. Victor accuses Bobby Rivera of selling out, while Bobby claims the same right to get rich and advance himself as any Anglo lawyer. Victor accuses him of twisting a knife into his own people.

In his summation to the jury, Victor says that the Anglo liquor company told a lie, hoping that people would believe it. "They knew people in this country always suspected Mexicans were different, that we were capable of all kinds of things. What

kind of people can squat down in the field all day and pick lettuce? What kind of people can stuff themselves in the back of a truck just to cross the border? Seventeen Mexicans died from the heat, just so they could be busboys in America. What kind of people would do that?" Victor continues, "Gatling Beer lied and pandered to American prejudice just so that they could sell more beer."

In this "LA Law" episode, lifted from an almost identical occurrence in real life, bias is seen as more than an individual's flaw; instead, institutional prejudice is revealed and examined.

BEHIND THE CAMERA

In analyzing minority characters on the screen, it is important to examine minority writers and producers behind the camera. The link between the creator and the image is strong.

Almost all the shows featuring minority characters studied for this report were created by white producers. Only eight of the 30 shows employ any minority producers; 22 shows have all-white production teams.

A total of 162 producers work on these programs. Of that total, only 12 producers (7%) are minorities; the rest (93%) are white.

Of the twelve minority producers, only four are female; two are Black and two are Asian. The Asian female producers work on "Jackee" and "Have Faith" (both of which have been cancelled). The Black female producers work on "A Different World." A Hispanic male producer works on "China Beach;" the other seven producers are Black men. They work on "A Different World," "A Man Called Hawk," "Amen," "Jackee," "The Robert Guillaume Show" and "227."

On the four sitcoms with all-Black casts analyzed in this report, only five out of 20 producers are Black. Three work on "A Different World," one works on "Amen," and one on "227." "The Cosby Show" has an all-white producer team; in contrast, the producer team of "A Different World" is 50 percent Black.

It is true that production teams change from season to season. In fact, almost one-third of the shows examined for this report have already been cancelled for the fall season, and different production teams are being assembled for those programs remaining on the air. What is captured by this analysis is a fleeting snapshot of names which are likely to change at any moment.

However, while the names will change, the ethnic ratios are likely to remain the same. One of the unbudging employment statistics in Hollywood is the small percentage of minority producers and writers working in the industry.

A recent Writers Guild study found that only <u>two</u> percent of all writers for television and film from 1982-1987 were minorities. This means that minority women writers constitute less than two percent of TV writers. Clearly, the image of women of color is not being created and developed by writers who share their heritage.

Such small employment numbers give important clues in deciphering program themes and messages. If television's integrated world is a happy one; if racism does not intrude into TV's workplace or neighborhood; if minority characters are nearly identical to their white buddies, the reason might be because white producers and writers are creating characters and developing plots out of their own experience and mindset.

Unfortunately, there is no indication that the employment situation will soon improve. The Writers Guild study documents half a decade's lack of progress. Right now, minority producers and writers are too small in number and too scattered across shows for any pervasive influence. They are far from a critical mass; in fact, their low percentages suggest token status.

Whatever progress occurred in Hollywood's workplace during the affirmative action push of the 1970s seems to have evaporated. One Black producer told a magazine recently, "After the uprising of the civil rights struggle, we had the industry on the ropes. As long as the pressure was on, they maintained some semblance of fairness. Once the pressure was off, they went back to business as usual -- excluding Blacks from executive and creative jobs in the industry." Such an exclusion is ironic in an industry known for its liberal politics.

Hollywood, like much of America, is a segregated town where minorities and whites do not socialize together and don't live near each other. Yet white producers and writers create the characters, develop the images and tell the stories of people of color whom they don't know very well.

People of color, on the other hand, tend to know more about white people because they live in a predominantly white culture. Despite this familiarity, their opportunities are limited. Minority writers and producers find themselves outnumbered by

whites, who create the characters and tell the stories of people of all races.

CONCLUSION

In the past two decades the image of Black men and women on television has improved. Twenty years ago, their numbers were lower and portrayals less diverse. They tended to be cast in subordinate support roles; men outnumbered women, stereotypes prevailed.

Today, Black characters appear regularly in almost one-third of all shows on television. Black women and men are equivalent in number and are more likely to be cast in roles of prestige. Their portrayals are more diverse than in years past, their image one of greater success.

However, Hispanic, Asian and Native American groups have been much less successful. It should be possible to devote an entire report to each separate ethnic group, rather than to examine them all in one study. But when there is only one Native American, three Asian and nine Hispanic characters on the screen, their low numbers limit extensive study. Such lack of visibility suggests that Hispanics, Asians and Native Americans are still suffering token status on TV. An important first step is to increase their numbers.

Even after one measures the increased visibility and more positive image of Black characters, though, further progress is hard to determine. In some ways, their successes are limited;

they are, to quote a Civil Rights Commission Report, "window dressing on the set."

As long as the profile of television producers and writers, studio and network executives and others running the industry remains as exclusively white as it is today, alternative visions from other groups will have a difficult time reaching the airwaves. Divergent views of comedy and drama will be marginalized. In short, people of color will be trapped in white reflections of themselves.

A studio executive recently said that the small number of people of color working in television "is the shame of our industry." In saying that, he did not mean that white people were incapable of producing programs enjoyed by minorities or vice versa. Both minorities and whites working in the industry have track records which prove the opposite.

Rather, his comment reflects the failure of one of the most influential mediums in America today to absorb the dynamic and varying aspects of its culture. The television industry is seemingly unable or unwilling to recruit and fully employ minority men and women, many of whom bring to the job sensibilities and experiences quite different from its own.

Hollywood's failure to hire and promote people of color is more than an issue of workplace equity and fairness. Because the television industry creates images which influence society's consciousness, the creators of those images hold enormous power.

REPORT METHODOLOGY

Unequal Picture analyzes the images of minority characters on prime time entertainment television. The report also examines the treatment of ethnic and racial issues on programs in which minority characters appear. During the spring of 1989 programs containing Black, Hispanic, Asian and Native American characters in recurring roles were monitored on a random basis. Over 150 program episodes were monitored altogether. For each male and female character, the following information was coded: race/ethnicity, age, socio-economic status, occupation and marital status.

The employment data for the report was coded from the program credits of the monitored episodes. Credits for executive producer, supervising producer, producer and co-producer were coded. Gender and race affiliations were confirmed with the production studios and networks.

* A Different World

* A Man Called Hawk (c)

* Amen

* China Beach

The Cosby Show

Designing Women

Dream Street (c)

Falcon Crest

* Have Faith (c)

Head of the Class

Heartbeat (c)

Hooperman (c)

Hunter

In the Heat of the Night

* Jackee (c)

Knots Landing

LA Law

Miami Vice (c)

Midnight Caller

Matlock

Mission: Impossible

Night Court

Nightingales (c)

One of the Boys (c)

Paradise

Perfect Strangers

* The Robert Guillaume Show (c)

Tour of Duty

21 Jump Street

* 227

(c)...Indicates show has been cancelled
*.....Indicates show with minority producer

Right now, those creators represent only a limited segment of society; the stories they tell are limited as well.

On television today, the portrayals of people of color, and whites too, are created almost solely by white producers and writers. In such a scheme, all viewers lose. White viewers lose because they rarely see their reflection from someone else's eyes. In addition, they are absorbing images of others which lack dimension and authenticity. Black, Hispanic, Asian and Native American viewers suffer because the complexity and reality of their lives are distorted into something that is unrecognizable.

In the real world today, relations between races are uneasy. In the world of tomorrow, society will be more diverse than ever before. In such a world, a real understanding of differing races, ethnicities and cultures is essential.

Television bears a special responsibility in this regard. In hiring and promoting people of color, it adds creators who can tell authentic stories about many segments of society. These stories, and their characters, can increase viewers' understanding of those different from themselves. Television's obligation is not to hinder this difficult task, but to help, by broadening its scope to include honest reflections of Black, Hispanic, Asian and Native American people.

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